

Long Island University faculty and students oppose lockout

A WSWS reporting team
9 September 2016

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team spoke with locked-out faculty and supporting students at Long Island University (LIU) on Tuesday, when the former overwhelmingly rejected the university's final "offer," and on Wednesday, the first day of the lockout.

Michael Pelias has been a professor of philosophy at LIU for 26 years and is a member of the LIUFF (the faculty union) Executive Committee and negotiating team. "We are known to strike. We had strikes in 1994, 2003 and 2011. We traditionally authorize a strike to show our strength in negotiations and we did so in May. The contract ended August 31st. Then Saturday 10 a.m. we were suddenly locked out. There has been no movement by management on any of our proposals or any reasonable activity, except for accepting half of a proposal on tenure, out of 25 proposals. We had 20 bargaining meetings since April.

"This is a draconian contract. It is part of the war on higher education in general. They want more control by a post-tenure review process. In higher education, most people are not reviewed after they have gained tenure. This is corporatization of the university system. They are testing in New York City to try to get post-tenure review. They are also testing a faculty lock out. There has never been a lockout of a university faculty before. Their contract demands are heavily against part-timers, who are 50 percent of the faculty and who teach 55 to 60 percent of the courses."

Asked about the way the unions have undermined the struggles of workers through their support of the Democratic Party, Professor Pelias replied, "I am part of the Executive Committee. I am part of the Executive Committee for our union, but I hate the higher-ups in the unions. I cannot stand the Democrats. You got welfare-to-workfare under the Clintons and it is the party of war. And this is all taking place on Obama's watch."

The lockout brings into sharp focus the increasing drive

toward the corporatization of education and the casualization of the teaching staff. An LIU professor of biology for six years, who did not want her name used, said, "Many of us are adjuncts. Tenured professors thought they were secure, but now we are all deprived of our jobs. No one can say they, their jobs, are safe anymore."

The attacks on the faculty by the university are not new. Michael Sohn, a non-tenured teacher of English for 17 years, recalled, "Five years ago when we were on strike, we accepted a contract that froze wages and cut health benefits and so it amounted to a wage cut. The university told us then that they were about to eliminate health benefits."

Now, he continued, "The University wants to cut the number of hours that the adjuncts teach from 12 to nine. We have no health benefits, but have a health care fund of about \$80,000 that helps us buy health insurance. They want to cut that."

John Katsigeorgis, an adjunct professor, has taught microbiology for eight years at LIU. "Everyone understands the lockout may continue. The four other unions have not had a contract for four years. That is why they were not locked out. The administration is trying to divide and conquer. It is not like we are asking for more. They are trying to pull away more. That is why everyone will stand up. We are giving up financially by this struggle for those who come after us.

"They try to make it look like they would be giving more money for adjuncts. But how are we getting more money if they cut the number of credits we can teach a semester by 25 percent, from 12 credits to nine? The science faculty teach a course of six credits because we have labs. I teach two courses, so I get paid for teaching 12 credits worth. But if I am limited to only nine credits, then I cannot do two courses and cannot make money for 12 credits. In addition, the new contract would pay new

hires less. Full-time faculty came out, but can get unemployment. Adjuncts cannot get unemployment unless they are working only one job. But adjuncts need to work more than one job. We have families.

“Quality will suffer. They will not be able to attract experienced people to come in and fill positions. Those that do will only do it for a while, while looking for something else. With eight years, I am still the low man because if people like their job, they stay. But this will change now.

“All the people hired as replacements probably do not even know they are temporary and could be out of a job in a few weeks. I know a colleague who got called in for a job in biology and was interviewed by Human Resources instead of the way it is supposed to be, with an interview from the Biology Department. They did this because they were planning the lockout.”

The determination by faculty to oppose their mistreatment at the hands of the university was expressed by Philip Wong, a professor of psychology, who declared, “I would be willing to strike even if the lockout ends and negotiations resume. We need the best contract possible.”

Another professor, who became an adjunct for the LIU nursing school after retiring from her permanent position, spoke about the relation of the lockout to the broader political situation. She responded, “The working guy is getting the shaft today. Health care is getting worse and the mortality rate is going up. Hillary is so freakin’ dishonest. I don’t like Trump.”

A permanent member of the faculty, teaching a course on ethics, Herb Sherman, also expressed frustration with the political situation. “Regarding the elections, Trump and Hillary are both embarrassments. People are waking up. The question is how do you bring people along to ideological change? How do you deal with it in a productive way? We need a system that gives people what they need.”

Many faculty spoke about the university president, who is spearheading the attack on the faculty as part of the corporatization of education.

An adjunct, who teaches directing, TV production and acting, told the WSWS, “Kimberly Cline, the LIU President, is trying to make a name for herself. She is Trump’s girl, very right wing. She knows what she is doing. She is a major administration money person.”

“It is not about education, but about the bottom line,” commented a professor of business. “It is not about the welfare of the students. It is just about how Cline looks on her resume. I teach my students that corporations are not

working in their interests.”

A full-time psychology professor stated, “This is obscene. Cline came from Mercy College. I know people there. They told me the people were literally dancing when she left there. This is an awful thing for education. It used to be equitable. Everyone ought to be valued the same. Now, if we are divided, we are defeated.”

Students expressed strong support for their professors.

Kruti Shah, a second year graduate student for a masters of arts in speech language pathology, said, “The lockout is unfair to both faculty and students. We can’t have the classes with the incredibly good professors that we signed up and paid tuition for. We are paying a lot of money—\$1,300 for one credit. We should be taught by the faculty that we adore.”

Jessica Smith, a second year student, expressed similar sentiments. “This lockout is unfair. It is slowing down our learning and jeopardizing our future. We pay \$33,000 per year. I already have more than \$10,000 in student loans.

“I don’t understand how the university is declaring that it is having financial difficulties with all this tuition. Where does this money go?

“Seeing all these professors out here protesting opens your eyes to reality; what the real world is all about.”

Students expressed concerns about their own futures. Oksana Smith, a third semester student, said, “I am studying early childhood education in order to teach children. I feel that it is very hard for people to find work in our profession.

“If we can’t find jobs that we want, then we will have to find work on side jobs like working in Burger King that do not pay anything, which is what I am doing now. No one can live off of less than \$300 per week.

“Everyone wants to be able to go to college tuition-free. Right now I am working to pay off my student loans. Everyone here is in the same situation.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact